

Hospitality

Home for the Entertainment Industry

An Interview with Mehdi Eftekari,
General Manager, Four Seasons Hotel Los Angeles at Beverly Hills



Entrance of the Four Seasons Hotel Los Angeles at Beverly Hills

EDITORS' NOTE Mehdi Eftekari has been with Four Seasons Hotels & Resorts since 1988. His first Four Seasons assignment was as Director of Food and Beverage at Four Seasons Hotel Los Angeles at Beverly Hills. He has also worked with Four Seasons Hotel Newport Beach (formerly a Four Seasons Hotel) and Hyatt Hotels of North America. He was born in Tehran and earned his bachelor's degree in Business Management and Marketing from The University of Louisville, Kentucky. In addition, he studied English at Georgetown University.



Mehdi Eftekari

PROPERTY BRIEF Located minutes from the world-renowned Rodeo Drive and Robertson Boulevard shops, Four Seasons Hotel Los Angeles at Beverly Hills (www.fourseasons.com/losangeles) provides the California al fresco lifestyle at its best with views of the Hollywood Hills or Beverly Hills from every guest room balcony. Boasting a total of 285 rooms, the property features a 3,500-square-foot spa and 1,100-square-foot fitness facility; exclusive dining options including the award-winning Culina, Modern Italian restaurant with its very own crudo bar; and an outdoor pool set on a tropically landscaped terrace, offering elevated city views.

What is your approach in leading this property?

The foundation for success is to love what you do, no matter what business you're in, and to be truly focused and dedicated to achieving high goals. It is also important to have well-trained and educated employees, who are equally determined to provide the best service. This combination has led to Four Seasons Los Angeles at Beverly Hills garnering several awards and accolades, as well as a very high guest return rate over the past 26 years. At the present time, it is a competitive market in the hotel industry, so it is very important to exceed guest expectations through personalized service and new innovations, especially with technology.

Who is the Four Seasons guest today?

Our niche is the entertainment industry. We have a fantastic Director of Entertainment Sales, Carol Watkins. From day one, her strong relationships in the entertainment community allowed us to gain the trust and confidence of the studios

and become the home to the majority of press junkets that take place before a movie comes out.

We gained the reputation of being the home-away-from-home for celebrities and the entertainment community over the years, due to our high level of service, range of amenities, and respect for privacy.

Would you give an overview of the accommodations, and is there a similar feel throughout?

We have 100 suites at the hotel including two Presidential Suites, a Royal Suite, four Premier Suites, and 13 Luxury Suites; as well as 15 One-Bedroom suites and 62 Executive Suites.

Our Suite Drive program has been very popular, as guests who book a suite from a one-bedroom category on up can select from 40 to 50 vehicles to use during the duration of their stay through Beverly Hills Rent a Car, upon availability. The guest is only responsible for the fuel and insurance on the car, because all of the rental costs are covered as part of the Suite Drive program.

If guests upgrade to the Presidential, Royal, or Premier Suite, however, they have access to exotic, high-branded cars as part of this program such as a Ferrari, Lamborghini, Maserati, Bentley or Rolls Royce. Guests can elect to pick up their vehicles at the airport or at Four Seasons Hotel.

What makes a hotel restaurant work, and how challenging is it to be successful within food and beverage in Los Angeles?

I spent the majority of my career in food and beverage, which is my true passion, and enabled us to create a unique restaurant concept for Los Angeles.

Even prior to getting approval for the new restaurant concept, we started talking to celebrity friends, return guests and the neighborhood, as well as staff and other local professionals to see what this area needed.

The first thing we had to do was separate the new restaurant from the hotel with its own identity and entrance. So we opened a freestanding restaurant located on the lobby level.

Working with the designer, we came up with the model called Modern Italian cuisine. We created a crudo bar and a restaurant that was contemporary. We hired a chef who could deliver upon the vision and concept, and put the top seasonal ingredients forth, allowing for much creativity.

Culina, Modern Italian opened in March 2010 and was a success from the first day because we promoted it as a destination, free-standing restaurant.

We secured over \$2 million in media value from our talented public relations and marketing team. Our chef was a contestant on *Iron Chef* and the restaurant was awarded by *Esquire* magazine as one of the nation's best new restaurants. Culina, Modern Italian became the darling of Los Angeles, and currently 75 percent of the restaurant business is from the local community.

How do you offer technology without losing the human touch for which you're known?

Technology is very important to our business but not at the cost of personal touch.

We are the first Four Seasons hotel in the world, and the first hotel (of any brand) on the West Coast, to have iPads with ICE technology in every single room free of charge. We installed over 40 apps on it so the customer can go online to order room service with all preferences considered, order any newspaper from around the world or make requests of housekeeping, for instance.

We just added pre check-in to the hotel. You can make an appointment for the Spa or request that your favorite dishes be ready in your guest room or suite when you arrive.

In a business with such high employee turnover, how have you been so successful with retention?

It's all about human relations. If people feel the general manager and senior management care for them, they have no reason to leave. You gain respect by being real and focused, letting them know you care for them, and doing whatever it takes to help them succeed. I have 20 hotel employees who are still here from 26 years ago, which says that these people have trusted the values and Golden Rule of Four Seasons to maintain their loyalty and passionate commitment to the hotel over the years.

Is a GM more of a generalist today?

There is a lot more work to be done, but I cannot forget my function as a GM: to be involved with the guests and the operation on a day to day basis. To do that, you have to be out there, to forge and maintain guest relationships, provide support to the employees, and ensure the entire hotel team is continuing to provide the best service possible. ●